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Impartial Memoirs

OF THE

LIFE

OF

THOMAS PAINE,

Author of "Rights of Man," "Common Sense," &c; and Member of the National Convention of France.

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

RIGHTS OF MAN.

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IMPARTIAL MEMOIRS

OF

THE LIFE

OF

THOMAS PAINE.

THE celebrated author of "The Rights of Man" has not been without his biographer. In a pamphlet which extends to one hundred and ſixty ſix pages, and which is publiſhed under the ſanction of the fictitious name of *Oldys*, we have been made acquainted with many particulars of Mr Paine's private hiſtory. This pamphlet is, in a high degree, uncandid and abuſive; and the writer of it had evidently dipped his pen in the bitter ſpirit of party-oppoſition. However, the incidents which it contains ſeem to have been collected with care and aſſiduity, and to reſt, as to their authenticity, on the evidence of dates and records. It ſhould be remembered, likewiſe, that theſe particulars have not been contradicted, either by Mr Paine, or by any

of his numerous admirers; moſt, if not all, of whom appear to have had no doubt of their reality. Perhaps, the impartial public may be pleaſed with beholding the following anecdotes ſtript of that *high colouring* which prejudice and party-malice are capable of giving to truth.

THOMAS PAINE was born at Thetford, in the county of Norfolk, on the 29th of January, 1737. His father, the ſon of a ſmall but reputable farmer, was a ſtay-maker by trade, and a quaker by religion: his mother was the daughter of an attorney at Thetford, and of the eſtabliſhed church. He was educated at his native town, under the Rev. William Knowles, maſter of the grammar ſchool at Thetford, and was deemed a boy of conſiderable abilities, though without much regular application. His ſtudies were directed, by his expectations, to what is uſeful, rather than to what is ornamental;—to reading, writing, and arithmetic. With this kind of inſtruction, he left the ſchool at the age of thirteen, in order to learn his father's buſineſs, which, though he did not like it, he continued to work at for nearly five years.

When almoſt twenty, and in the year 1756, the ſubject of theſe memoirs entered London, the common receptacle of the filly and the wiſe, of the poor and the opulent, of the buſy and the idle. He worked for ſometime with Mr Morris, a very noted ſtay-maker, in Hanover-ſtreet, Long-Acre. He did

did not, however, continue long in London; and it ſeems probable that this was the period at which he made his ſea-faring adventure.

At an early age, (as he himſelf obſerves,) raw and adventurous, and heated with the falſe heroiſm of a maſter who had ſerved in a man-of-war, he began the career of his own fortune, and entered on board the *Terrible* privateer, captain Death. From this adventure he was happily prevented by the affectionate and moral remonſtrance of a good father, who, from his own habits of life, being of the quaker profeſſion, muſt have begun to look upon him as loſt. But the impreſſion, much as it effected at the time, began to wear away, and he entered afterwards in the *King of Pruſſia* privateer, and went with her to ſea. What the event of his expedition was, whether ſucceſsful or otherwiſe, we are not informed; but it is certain that in this way of life he did not long perſevere: for, in the year 1758, we find him at Dover, where he worked at his trade for almoſt a twelvemonth.

In April 1759, he ſettled, as a maſter ſtay-maker, at Sandwich; and, on the 27th of September following, married Mary Lambert, a pretty girl of modeſt behaviour, and the daughter of an exciſeman. At Sandwich, however, he did not continue long: but on the 7th of April 1760, went, with his wife, to Margate, and, a little time after, having loſt his wife, again mingled with the crowds of London.

The trials which our author had made of his trade, as they had brought him no pleaſure and little gain, induced him, at this time, to renounce it for ever. When a youth, he had enquired into the duty, and envied the perquiſites, of an exciſeman. His wife had, doubtleſs, ſpoken of the honours and emoluments of her deceaſed father. And he was induced by theſe conſiderations, in July, 1761, to ſeek for ſhelter in his father's houſe, that he might proſecute, in quiet privacy at Thetford, the great object of his future courſe.

After fourteen months of ſtudy, Mr Paine was eſtabliſhed in the exciſe, on the 1ſt of December, 1762, at the age of twenty-five. He owed this gratification of his wiſhes to the friendly interference of Mr Cockſedge, the learned recorder of Thetford: but in this ſituation he did not continue more than two or three years; for it is certain that, whatever was the cauſe, he was diſmiſſed from his office on the 27th of Auguſt, 1765.

In conſequence of this misfortune, our celebrated author was reduced to great want. He is ſaid to have been, for ſome time, almoſt without food and ſhelter. On the 11th of July, 1766, he was reſtored to his office; a circumſtance which ſeems to prove that he had not merited his diſmiſſion.

Mere reſtoration, however, did not bring him immediate employment. At this interval, he was employed

employed to teach engliſh at an academy in Leman-ſtreet, Goodman's-Fields, for which he received a ſalary of twenty-five pounds a year; and afterwards he lived, for a ſhort time, in a ſimilar ſituation at Kenſington.

In March, 1768, he was ſent to be an exciſe officer at Lewes, in Suſſex. In this place he lodged with Mr Ollive, a tobacconiſt; after whoſe death, in 1769, he opened the ſhop in his own name as a grocer, and married Elizabeth Ollive, the daughter of his late landlord. This period is ſaid to have been one of the happieſt parts of his life.

In 1771, he made his firſt appearance as a writer. The poets of Lewes were called upon, by one of the candidates for the *honour* (we muſt not ſay, the *intereſt*) of repreſenting in parliament the electors of New Shoreham, to furniſh an appropriate ſong; and Mr Paine obtained the laurel, with three guineas for his labour.

In 1772, a deſign was formed by the exciſe officers throughout the kingdom, to apply to parliament for ſome addition to their ſalaries. Our author, being one of the leading men among them, was requeſted to write their *Caſe*, which he produced and publiſhed, after many months' application. This is an octavo pamphlet of twenty-one pages, which, excluſive of the *Introduction*, is divided into two heads, viz *The State of the Salary of the Officers of the Excise*; and *Thoughts on the Corruption ariſing from*

from the Poverty of Excise Officers. On these topics he says all that the ablest writer could have said. Four thousand of the *Case* were printed at Lewes; but, notwithstanding this effort, no application was made to parliament.

In the month of April, 1774, misfortunes crowded fast upon him. The effects of his shop were sold to pay his debts. Having dealt likewise, as a grocer, in exciseable articles, he was suspected (whether with reason or otherwise, does not appear) of unfair practices; and, on the 8th of the same month, was again dismissed from the excise, after a dozen years' service.

On the 24th of May following, Mr Paine and his wife entered into articles of separation; and these articles were, in consequence of some disagreement, again drawn on the 4th of June. Some persons have not scrupled to assert that he treated his wife with cruelty, and that this was the cause of their separation.

Towards the close of the year, in consequence of a strong recommendation to Dr Franklin, he formed the resolution of quitting his native country; and in the month of September, he set sail for America. He arrived at Philadelphia in the winter, a few months, as he himself relates, before the battle of Lexington, which was fought in April, 1775.

In the new world, his first employment was that of shopman to Mr Aitkin, an industrious bookseller

ler at Philadelphia, with a ſalary of twenty pounds a year. Soon after, he turned chemiſt; and in November, as foreign ſupplies of gunpowder were ſtopped, he employed his fertile genius in making experiments for the purpoſe of diſcovering ſome cheap and expeditious method of furniſhing Congreſs with ſaltpetre.

From this æra he becomes more known, and his conduct is entitled to particular attention. On the 10th of January 1776, he publiſhed his celebrated pamphlet, intitled *Common Sense*. This work was univerſally read, and very generally applauded. The firſt edition was quickly ſold. A ſecond, with a ſupplement of one third more, was immediately prepared. But let us here attend to Mr Paine himſelf. Speaking of the teſtimony which his own heart bore to his integrity, he thus remarks:

"Politics and ſelf-intereſt have been ſo uniformly connected, that the world, from being ſo often deceived, has a right to be ſuſpicious of public characters. But with regard to myſelf, I am perfectly eaſy on this head. I did not, at my firſt ſetting out in public life, nearly ſeventeen years ago, turn my thoughts to ſubjects of government from motives of intereſt; and my conduct, from that moment to this, proves the fact. I ſaw an opportunity in which I thought I could do ſome good, and I followed exactly what my heart dictated. I neither read books

nor ſtudied other people's opinions. I thought for myſelf. The caſe was this:

"During the ſuſpenſion of the old government in America, both prior to, and at the breaking out of hoſtilities, I was ſtruck with the order and decorum with which every thing was conducted, and impreſſed with the idea that a little more than what ſociety naturally performed, was all the government that was neceſſary, and that monarchy and ariſtocracy were frauds and impoſitions upon mankind. On theſe principles, I publiſhed the pamphlet, Common Senſe. The ſucceſs it met with was beyond any thing ſince the invention of printing. I gave the copy-right up to every ſtate in the union, and the demand ran to not leſs than one hundred thouſand copies."—Owing to this diſintereſted conduct of Mr. Paine, it ſeems that, notwithſtanding the extenſive ſale of the pamphlet, he was in debt to the printer, to the amount of 29l. 12s. 1d.

In the courſe of this year, 1776, Mr. Paine joined the army, but in what capacity is not known. It is certain, however, that he accompanied Waſhington in his retreat from Hudſon's River to the Delaware. At this time, the congreſs fled, and all were terrified. But our author was undiſmayed. He ſaw that the americans were poſſeſſed of reſources ſufficient to authoriſe hope, and he endeavoured to inſpire others with the ſame confidence. With this view, on the 19th of December, he publiſhed the *Criſis*, wherein he

he ſtates every topic of hope, and examines every motive of apprehenſion. This work, which extended to thirteen numbers, he publiſhed at different intervals, till the complete eſtabliſhment of the revolution. The laſt number appeared on the 19th of April, 1783, the ſame day that a ceſſation of hoſtilities was proclaimed.

In 1777, Congreſs unanimouſly, and unknown to Mr. Paine, appointed him ſecretary in the foreign department; and from this time, he enjoyed the correſpondence of Franklin. This appointment was agreeable to him, becauſe it gave him the opportunity of ſeeing into the abilities of foreign courts, and their manner of doing buſineſs. But a miſunderſtanding ariſing between congreſs and him, reſpecting one of their commiſſioners, then in Europe, Mr. Silas Deane, he reſigned the office on the 8th of January, 1779, and declined, at the ſame time, the pecuniary offers made him by the miniſters of France and Spain, M. Gerard, and Don Juan Mirralles.

Soon after this, he was made maſter of arts by the Univerſity of Philadelphia; and, in 1780, was choſen a member of the American Philoſophical ſociety, when it was revived by the legiſlature of the province of Penſylvania. His independence, as a political writer, was well known. His patriotiſm had gained him many friends; and, among others, it appears

that General Washington entertained a high sense of the importance of his services.—On account of these services, New York conferred on him some forfeited lands at New-Rochelle, and Pensylvania presented him with five hundred pounds.

As his exertions were no longer necessary in America, he set sail for France in the autumn of 1786, and arrived at Paris in the beginning of the year 1787; carrying with him his fame as a writer, and the model of a bridge, which was shewn to the Academy of Sciences. From Paris he came over to England on the 3d of September; just thirteen years after his departure for Philadelphia. Before the end of the month, he went to Thetford to see his mother, to whom he allowed 9s a week; but, owing to the bankruptcy of the american merchant who was appointed to pay it, this allowance was afterwards stopped.

During part of the year 1788, Mr. Paine resided at Rotheram in Yorkshire, where his iron bridge was cast and erected, chiefly at the expence of the ingenious Mr. Walker. The design, however, had cost our author a considerable sum, and the assignees of the american merchant, finding six hundred and twenty pounds charged against him, caused him to be arrested on the 29th of October, 1789. On this occasion, two respectable merchants became his bail; and on his paying down four hundred and sixty pounds, which he had received from America, and giving his

note

note for the remainder, he was ſet at liberty in November, after three weeks' confinement.

In conſequence of the publication of Mr. Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution," Mr. Pain, produced, in the month of February 1791, his well known work, intitled the "Rights of Man." This pamphlet was printed for Mr. Johnſon, in St. Paul's church yard: but the work containing ſome ſevere though juſt reflections on various parts of the Engliſh government, Mr. Johnſon was induced, by the advice of ſome of his friends, to decline the publication of it; and, after a month's delay, it was publiſhed on the 13th of March, by Mr. Jordan, in Fleet-Street.

About the middle of May, Mr. Paine again went to France. When the king fled from Paris, he obſerved to his friend, Mr. Chriſtie, "You ſee the abſurdity of monarchical governments. Here will be a whole nation diſturbed by the folly of one man." On the return of the king, our author was in conſiderable danger. An officer proclaimed the will of the national aſſembly, that all ſhould be ſilent and covered. In a moment, all hats were on. Mr. Paine, however, had loſt his cockade, the emblem of attachment to liberty and equality. A cry aroſe *Ariſtocrat! Ariſtocrat! A' la lanterne! A' la lanterne!* He was deſired, by thoſe who ſtood near him, to put on his hat. And it was not till after ſome time that the mob was ſatisfied by explanation.

On the 13th of July, he returned to London; but it was not thought prudent that he ſhould attend the celebration of the french revolution. He afterwards drew up *the addreſs* and *declaration* of the gentlemen who met at the Thatched-houſe-tavern, on the 20th of Auguſt following.

In the month of February 1792, appeared the ſecond part of "Rights of Man;" a publication, which has conferred additional celebrity on its author, and greatly increaſed the number of converts to the cauſe of liberty, and juſt government.

The ſale of theſe juſtly-admired productions has been much greater than that of, perhaps, any work ever publiſhed. When the ſecond part of "Rights of Man" appeared, the number of copies to which the firſt part had extended, including England, Scotland, and Ireland, was not leſs than between forty and fifty thouſand; and when it is recollected that, excluſive of the ſecond, the firſt part of the work has now been twelve months longer on ſale, and that cheap editions of each have been publiſhed, many ſcore of thouſands of which have been ſold, the number purchaſed cannot be ſuppoſed to fall far ſhort of, if indeed it does not exceed, two hundred thouſand copies.

On the 6th of September following, Mr. Paine was elected, by the department of Calais, as their repreſentative in the national convention of France. He left London on the 13th inſtant; and, after having experienced the ſcandalous inſults of the miniſterial party at Dover, arrived at Calais next day, after a paſſage of three hours. He was received with

with great affection, and with diſtinguiſhed marks of reſpect, by his conſtituents; and, in the important ſtation he now occupies, has ever acted an honourable and uſeful part. Though he did not vote for the death of Louis Capet, he had no doubts of his guilt. On account of his objection to capital puniſhments, and in conſideration of the late king having been the dupe of others, he wiſhed that his ſentence ſhould be impriſonment during the war, and, afterwards, baniſhment to America.

THUS have we preſented to our readers the principal circumſtances of Mr Paine's hiſtory. The changes, which he has witneſſed, have been various; and the man, who can drop a tear of ſorrow at the recollection of the miſeries of his fellow-creatures, will feel regret ſtill more poignant when contemplating the many difficulties under which that man has laboured who may juſtly be ſtyled the BENEFACTOR of NATIONS. But, perhaps, (as he has well obſerved) it is to his advantage that he has ſerved an apprenticeſhip to life. He now knows the value of moral inſtruction; for he has ſeen the danger of the contrary.

The number of converts to Mr Paine's ſentiments on civil government is rapidly increaſing. It is a claſs which comprehends the moſt truly independent characters throughout the nation; men,

who

who belong to no party but that of truth, and who acknowledge no objects of political adoration but those of public liberty and public happiness. The names of *pittite* and *foxite*, with those other blandishments with which *interest* has contrived to catch the eyes and seduce the attention of the unthinking and the vulgar, are regarded by them as the rattles of childhood. They aspire to a nobler character; and, instead of consigning their understandings to the custody of others, are determined to take the trouble of thinking for themselves.

Yet we would not be uncandid; we would not be unjust. Candour is the fair offering of ingenuous excellence, and justice is the due of all. Many, no doubt, there are who oppose reformation from conviction, and whose upright hearts, if accompanied with enlightened understandings, would shrink with horror at the idea of those miseries which corrupt ambition has occasioned.—But heaven be praised for that light which is already diffused, and which will assuredly dispel the mental darkness that has so long over-shadowed the earth!

THE END.